

## **Cruise ship sewage bill plugged up**

By TOM BELL, Portland Press Herald Writer

AUGUSTA — A bill that sets wastewater standards for cruise ships in Maine waters has run aground, tabled in the Senate after the industry sent word that ships might not call at Maine ports anymore. The bill had won strong bipartisan support in committee, but Sen. John Martin, D-Eagle Lake, tabled it last week after getting a phone call from a prominent Maine businessman who passed on the industry's warning.

On Monday, the state Department of Environmental Protection offered a new version of the bill. It would allow cruise ships with advanced treatment systems to discharge effluent in Maine waters. The ships would not have to be licensed, a requirement in the current bill.

Martin, co-chair of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee, seemed pleased with the changes. He said they will allow the state to protect Maine waters without alienating the cruise ship industry.

"The last thing you want is the industry upset with us for nothing," he said.

But Martin's legislative maneuver upset some legislators. The sponsor of the original bill, Rep. Herb Adams, D-Portland, said lawmakers have been working on the bill for almost a year and that Martin has allowed the industry to change it at the last minute.

"It's the worst kind of Washington arm-twisting," Adams said. "This is not Maine."

The committee's House chair, Ted Koffman, D-Bar Harbor, said he doesn't like the new version and will work on the House floor to restore the original bill, which would require cruise ships to pay \$150 for a five-year license. He said the cruise ship owners want to be exempt from any kind of environmental regulation.

"We are trying to protect our waters," Koffman said.

Martin tabled the bill after getting a call Wednesday evening from Cianbro President Peter Vigue, who was at a shipping industry trade show in Miami at the time.

In an interview, Vigue said he told Martin what cruise line executives had told him, that Maine is not that popular as a destination and that their ships might not call at Maine ports if the state imposes stringent discharge regulations.

"It concerns me that outside of Maine we are not seen as business-friendly," said Vigue, who sees himself as a private "ambassador" for the state.

Vigue was in Florida looking for business opportunities. He is especially interested in using his company's Portland facility to refurbish the USS United States, a 1950s liner now mothballed in Philadelphia.

Adams said most Maine residents don't have the power to stop a bill with one phone call. "I wish I had that much influence," he said.

Twenty-three cruise ships visited Portland last year, and at least 26 are expected this year.

The ships produce an average of 13,000 gallons of sewage a day, as well as an average of 195,000 gallons of contaminated "gray water" from on-board showers, sinks, laundries and galleys.

Federal law does not allow vessels to pump raw sewage into coastal waters. But there are no federal or state laws against dumping partially treated sewage and gray water. The bill would ban cruise ships from dumping gray water within three miles of the Maine coast.

However, lawmakers are struggling to find a way to deal with a new sewage treatment technology that is used by a small percentage of cruise ships on the East Coast. The technology allows ships to treat sewage so that it is almost drinkable. However, ships with the technology have no room for storing water, and under the legislation couldn't dump the water inside the three-mile limit.

Lawmakers wanted to license such ships and bring them under the state's regulatory process. But ship operators don't want to face different regulations in every state, said John Delahanty, a lawyer representing the International Council of Cruise Lines.

The DEP amendment would allow ships with the new technology to forgo the licensing process, as long as they provide the state with a plan for monitoring water quality, keeping records and providing the state with data every year.

Koffman said he will watch closely to make sure an easing of proposed restrictions does not compromise the quality of waters near Bar Harbor, where lobstering and aquaculture are key industries.

"If any of them get zapped, we're going to have a different kind of bill next year," Koffman said.

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